

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR CHanneled WHELKS

Channeled whelks (*Busycotypus canaliculatus*) are harvested along the mid-Atlantic coast mostly for export market. They are harvested in Maryland primarily by pot and as bycatch in the otter trawl fishery. The minimum legal size for harvesting whelks in Maryland is 6 inches (152.4 mm) shell length. The Department is considering two changes:

1) Adopt a minimum girth size of 3-3/8 inches. At the Coastal Commercial Fisheries Forum held on October 16, 2015, a commercial constituent indicated that he would like the Department of Natural Resources to consider changing the channeled whelk minimum size measurement from length to girth. The Department periodically receives calls from harvesters complaining that whelks are lost to the fishery when the tips of the whelks are broken off before or during harvesting, which makes an otherwise legally harvestable whelk ineligible for harvest. Similarly, there is concern that the anterior canal may break off during handling. In order to harvest a damaged channeled whelk at 6 in. minimum shell length, the recommendation is to set a minimum girth (diameter) equivalent to that length. The diameter of the shell at the widest point would have to be at least 3.375 in. for channeled whelks. This was derived from two studies on length/girth ratios with slightly different results. Fisher (2012) calculated that a 6 in. channeled whelk averages 3.23 in. However, Doctor (2009) found that the diameter at the widest point should be 3.5 in. for a 6 in. long channeled whelk. As a compromise, the recommended minimum girth is 3.375 in., which is equivalent to 3-3/8 inches.

2) Require an escape vent in traps. A commercial constituent asked the Department to consider implementing a 2 in. escape vent in the traps to allow undersized whelks to escape. The Department is considering implementing the escape vent, but would allow a grace period of 12-18 months for harvesters to retrofit their gear.

Additional Information:

- 1) Doctor, Steve. 2009. Channeled Whelk (*Busycotypus canaliculatus*) Size Structure in the Commercial Fishery off the Maryland Coast. Maryland Department of Natural Resources.
- 2) Fisher, R.A. 2012. Channeled Whelk Assessment. Virginia Institute of Marine Science. http://www.vims.edu/research/units/centerspartners/map/frg/reports/docs_frg_reports/FRG2009_12_Robins.pdf